

## Big Dewar of Balemartin, Tiree

He was John MacLean, a native of Dowart in the Island of Mull, who fled to Jura. He is said to have been the first man from that island who settled in Tiree, and on that account was known as Dewar (*Diùrach*). He and his seven sons were alike powerful and strong men. They held the township of Balemartin (on the south side of Tiree), including Sorabi, where a burying ground is, and where there was at one time a chapel to which was attached the land of Sorabi garden. At this time the people in the island were paying rent or tax (*cìs*), but it was found impossible to make Big John Dewar submit to pay the tax. This first time any attempt was made to compel him to pay it, he took with him his seven sons to Island-House, the proprietor's residence, and put them on the sward in front of the house (*air dòirlinn an eilein*) saying, "This is the payment I have brought you, and you may take it or leave it." Another attempt to enforce payment from him ended as told in the following account :-

One day when he and his sons were ploughing, two of the sons being at Sorabi, as there were few people in the neighbourhood, and his sons were at some distance from him, he had to go himself to the smithy to repair the ploughshare (*a ghlasadh an t-suic*). It was the beginning of summer, and he left the horses in the plough, eating the wild mustard (*sgeallan*) in the field where he was ploughing, grass and other herbage being scant. While their father was away at the smithy, the boys who were at Sorabi, on taking a look seawards, observed a boat (*birlinn*) coming in towards the shore. It kept its course for the small bay of boats (*port nan long*), in Balemartin, and had on board a very strong man called "Dark John Campbell" (*Iain Dubh Caimbeul*), who was sent to collect the tax from those in the island who were unwilling to pay it. He had an able crew with him in the boat. They landed and when they reached the place where Dewar was ploughing, the first thing they did was seize the horses in the plough (*na h-eich a bha 's an t-seisreach*), to take them away in the boat as payment of the tax. When they were almost ready to be off, Dewar came in sight on his return from the smithy. On seeing the unwelcome strangers he quickened his steps to intercept them, and took hold of the horses to take them back. Campbell drew his sword, bidding him be off as fast as he could or he would put his head beside his feet. Dewar drew his own sword and said, "Come on and do all you are able." The fray began between the, and Dewar was driving Campbell, Inverary, backwards until he put him in among the graves (*lic*) in the burying-ground, and it so happened that Campbell stumbled on MacLean's cross and fell backwards. Before he could raise himself Dewar got the upper hand of him. On seeing him fall, his men were certain that he must have been killed, and they went away with the horses to the boat and put off to sea. "Let me rise," Campbell said, "and I will give you my word that I will never come again on the same errand." "I will" Dewar said "but give me your oath on that, that it will be as that" (*gu 'm bi sin mar sin*). Campbell gave his word, "and more than that," he said, "I will send you the value of the horses when I reach Inverary." "You will now come with me to my house," Dewar said, "And you need not have fear or dread ; your house quarters and welcome will not be worse than my own, till you can find a way of returning home." In the course of some days Campbell got away, and he never returned again to "bullyrag" or intimidate any one. On reaching Inverary he was as good as his word. He sold the horses and sent the price to Dewar, who was never compelled to pay the tax.